

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH REAR ADMIRAL RICHARD LANDOLT, U.S. NAVY, COMMANDER, AMPHIBIOUS FORCE 7TH FLEET, OKINAWA, JAPAN, VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM WHITE BEACH, OKINAWA SUBJECT: HUMANITARIAN RELIEF EFFORTS FOLLOWING THE SEPTEMBER EARTHQUAKES TIME: 8:00 A.M. EDT DATE: THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2009

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PETTY OFFICER WILLIAM SELBY (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Hello. I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable for Thursday, October 22nd, 2009. My name is Petty Officer William Selby, with the Office of the Secretary of Defense/Public Affairs, and I will be moderating our call today.

A note to the bloggers on the line: Please remember to clearly state your name and blogger organization in advance of your question; respect our guest's time, keeping questions succinct and to the point.

Today our guest is Rear Admiral Richard Landolt, commander, Amphibious Force 7th Fleet in Okinawa, Japan, who will discuss the U.S. Navy's humanitarian relief and disaster response operations in Sumatra, Indonesia, following the September 30th earthquakes.

And somebody else just joined us?

Q Yeah. This is Taylor Kiland with the Navy Memorial.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Hi, Taylor. Okay. Well, we're just getting started.

And sir, if you have your opening statement, you can go ahead with that now.

ADM. LANDHOLT: Okay. Thanks. I appreciate this opportunity to speak with you all. I am coming to you from White Beach, Okinawa, which is where the Amphibious Force 7th Fleet headquarters is. And what I'd like to do is just give a little running diary of what happened over the past two-and-a-half weeks.

But it was around the 29th, 28th of September when the ships in my Amphibious Ready Group, which included -- among them were USS Denver, USS Tortuga and USS Harpers Ferry -- were unloading their Marines for fall patrol. We had been keeping an eye on the weather, as we always do, and we had a pretty good sense that a couple of storms were probably going to head towards the Philippines. And the way we track these storms during the season -- and at this

time of the season, these storms will usually start to head north and swing towards Japan.

And so we got our ships under way for the Philippines, where they were going to head anyway for an exercise they were going to be involved in. So as they were heading down towards the Philippines -- that is on the 30th of September -- there were a series of three earthquakes in and around Sumatra, two out at sea -- one was about a 7.9 earthquake, I believe -- and two others that were considered aftershocks, but they were still in the 6.5 or above Richter scale region.

The ships continued on down towards the Philippines and commenced making preps for humanitarian assistance operations there.

And at some point around the 1st or 2nd of October, I was notified that I should be sent down to Indonesia and be the face of American assistance for -- be the face -- mission commander for U.S. forces in support of the humanitarian assistance/disaster relief.

While I was making preps to go down there, my boss, who is the commander of Seventh Fleet and commander of Pacific Fleet, who is Admiral Walsh -- they decided to -- we caucused and decided to send USS Denver, break her away from the three ships that were headed towards the Philippines and send her south towards Indonesia, with three heavy-lift helicopters: CH-53s of the Marine Corps.

There was also a ship in Hong Kong doing a port visit, at the time, the USS McCampbell. And she was assigned and detached to head south as well, in company with the Denver. All this happened in about a 48-hour period between the 1st and 3rd of October.

My other two ships, Harpers Ferry and Tortuga, remained behind in the Philippines. And they were put under the command of Brigadier General Mark Brilakis. And they spent the next week to 10 days working humanitarian assistance for the Philippines.

I arrived in Indonesia the morning of the 4th of October and into Jakarta. And on the 4th, I headed down to Padang, which is where the hardest-hit region was. Padang is a city of about 900,000. And in the suburbs there are another 90 to 100,000.

So you're looking at an area of about 1 million people. But Padang is very much a metropolitan area.

It's a coastal city, a lot of tourism -- tourists there. It's big on the surfer circuit, as I understand, now.

And I came down with a HAST team, H-A-S-T, humanitarian assistance and survey team, of about a dozen folks of mine. And they will -- they will go out, and they all have various specialties, be it medical or civil engineering or lift or a supply corps officer in there, and they will go out and survey in concert with the local government, USAID, disaster-relief teams, other NGOs.

And the TNI -- when I say TNI, that is the initials that represent the Indonesian military -- so they give us a steer on where to -- where to focus our efforts in surveying and assessing the damage. And that takes one to three days. And that -- and it took us a while, but we had the time to do that while

the USS Denver and the Campbell were headed south from the Philippines. That was a six-day transit.

So there was some benefit in not having forces at the ready, because it made us -- it allowed us the opportunity to really focus them when they got there by allowing that HAST team to survey and decide where help was needed.

This was very much a learning experience for me, and I'd like to point out a couple of things that might help you better experience the journey I had. And one of the experiments we tried first of all was setting up a Twitter and a Facebook page. And if you go to Amphibious Forces 7th Fleet Facebook, and just Google that, you'll see all the articles we wrote -- my public affairs folks wrote and that we posted to that page, and the Twitter inputs we made as well.

I tried to use Twitter as a way to talk to somebody, say, in the fifth grade. As I learned something that I thought was useful, I would twit (sic) something out and post it, and a factoid on what we were doing, or -- what kind of capacity a CH-53 helicopter has, for instance. I think if you check out that page, you'll learn an awful lot.

So after the ships got there, this was our approach, and all this was done in company with an agreement with the NGOs, the USAID disaster relief team and the U.S. embassy, as well as the government of Indonesia and the TNI.

As I learned from these folks, particularly the NGOs and the DART team, first you want to -- what we wanted to do here, and it's not uncommon in scenarios like this, is take care of the city first and then move as quickly as you can out to the countryside. Some of the metrics that I learned in how you gauge whether the city is being taken care of is that if there are no infectious diseases and there's not a lot of diarrhea going on or as witnessed in the people who come to the hospital, then you're getting enough water to the people in the city. Water is key first off.

When we went down to see Padong, they have four major hospitals; three of them were leveled and a fourth was 25 percent destroyed. And that hospital also happened to be that hospital that the TNI, the military, used.

So, fortunately, there were two things available right away. One was a group of Special Ops group folks. The 353rd Special Ops group out of Kadena were down for an exercise when this happened. So there were folks on the ground who were able to help set me up with communications, remote communications, and they had a C-130 with them, which allowed my staff and I to fly from Jakarta and back whenever we needed that.

Also, this was the first operational employment of something called a HARRT, H-A-R-R-T. And it stands for Humanitarian Assistance Ready Response Team. They're out of Guam, but they have elements in Alaska that come down. What this basically is is an Air Force field hospital.

And they flew in rapidly, set up a couple of tents and set up a field unit in a soccer field, and were able to start seeing about 3(00) to 400 patients a day. So that provided some relief to those -- to lack of hospital capacity down there.

But we had those to work with until the ships got there on the evening of the 8th of October. So no infectious diseases, no diarrhea; enough water was getting into the city, thanks to -- I need to thank the -- our Australian

friends for that. They brought a couple of ROWPU units, reverse osmosis -- reverse-osmosis water purification units. And they were able to provide about 200,000 liters a day and insert that into the -- their -- the grid there.

Once you have the city stabilized, then it's time to worry about the countryside. And here's an acronym I learned, called WASH, W-A-S- H, and it stands for "water, sanitation and hygiene." They also throw in shelter as one of the "S's" in there. But it's -- if you have water, sanitation, hygiene and people living in tents, they're not going to migrate. They're not going to become refugees or internally displaced people.

And so that was the biggest concern as my ships arrived; it was that, will we have displaced people start arriving in the cities, causing a problem of refugee camps to have to be set up, or IDP camps, internally displaced persons. So our focus, when the heavy -- when the ships with the heavy-lift helicopters showed up, was to get as much cargo to the countryside, in the form of tents and water and food, and to try to keep the people in place out in the countryside as best we could.

Ninety percent of the structures in the countryside were considered destroyed, because of the magnitude of those earthquakes. So once those 53's came aboard on the morning of the 9th of October, we put them to work; first getting survey teams out to the countryside to see where would be the best locations to drop the cargo that we wanted to get there, and also to get people in place, because when these helicopters start showing up with cargo, the first concern is crowd control, crowd management. You don't want people rushing the helicopters. So you try to get people on the ground first and -- to manage that. And so that makes it easier when the cargo loads come in, that you don't have people rushing the cargo loads or getting hurt by the downwash from the helicopters.

The countryside was inaccessible for most of that first week, because landslides had just destroyed the roads out to the countryside. And that's what we learned from the initial HAST team of mine, as well as some of the surveyors from the NGOs and the DART team.

So our focus over Friday the 9th through about Tuesday was just ponying up, getting cargo out there, getting the WASH cargo, shelter and water out to the countryside. And that's what we focused on those days, as well as getting assessors out there to locations that are hard to get to.

There came a point around -- it turned out to be Monday, but I wasn't able to see that until Tuesday, where there was an inflection point where we saw that we had (topped ?) off in tonnage being lifted on a daily basis. First day, we got 6,000 pounds out to the countryside. Second day, we got 16,000 pounds out. Third day, we were not so successful because we were working with the Indonesian military on some outlying cargo-placement areas that turned out not to be at the GPS points they had provided us, so we lost most of that day, but then we made up for it on Monday with nearly 70,000 pounds taken out to the countryside.

I had been maintaining daily briefings with the embassy and the NGO folks, and I kind -- I kind of saw that there would be an inflection point where we would see -- the countryside would start to open up and be accessible by road, and that's the way the NGOs would prefer to take these out there, and that our lift demand would start to diminish.

And it did. I thought it would be around Wednesday or Thursday, but it turned out to be Monday with that 70,000 pounds. The next day we had about 35,000 pounds, and so I went to the embassy and NGOs and said, "What's your assessment on how much more you need from us? Because I'm seeing the -- I think we're seeing the side wave now peak."

I think that's probably a pretty good (dump ?) for you right now. Anything -- any holes I can fill in from you all right now? I'll take some questions.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: No, that's -- that's probably good, sir, and we're going to go ahead and move on to the questions now.

So, Maggie, if you want to go ahead with your first question, and then we'll move it on to Taylor.

Q Okay. Were there any other countries helping you? I heard you mention Australia. And of course, the Indonesian military was helping you. ADM. LANDHOLT: Yes, ma'am. Australia came with a ship, the HMAS Kanimbla. And as we were leaving, that ship came with a group of civil engineers that specialized in rice paddy irrigation. And I can't tell you how helpful that was in helping to reestablish a settled countryside.

There were also doctors from Japan. I think the one liaison officer I met from the Japanese military said there were 60 doctors that came from Japan. I saw some folks from the Singaporean army there, and --

Q I'm sorry, sir. From the what army?

ADM. LANDOLT: Singaporean.

Q Oh, okay.

ADM. LANDOLT: Singaporean. Australia, Japan; I think -- I think there were more, but those are the three that I saw around my airfield that I was using in -- and out in town, working.

Q Thank you, sir.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Okay, Taylor. And you can go ahead with your question.

Q Yeah, thank you, Admiral. Did you -- in talking to your crew, did you get any reaction from your ship's crews about how they felt about participating in this relief effort? And had any of them participated in relief efforts before or anything of this magnitude? And what sort of -- what sort of reactions did they have?

ADM. LANDOLT: That's a great question. The USS Denver, in late August, was involved with an HA/DR mission off Taiwan. They had been hit by the -- Typhoon Morakot, and they went down there and helped, and they were there a week. And so they were fresh off that with plenty of experience.

They came down to Indonesia, and they -- their attitude was just outstanding. I would say the only thing that frustrated them was that they were out at sea. They wished they could do something ashore. I tried to mitigate that by bringing a pair of officers off both the Campbell and Denver to come

ashore every day and just see and have that experience of seeing the damage and meeting NGOs and country-team folks and my folks on the ground who were doing a lot of the logistics work in getting the lifts out to the countryside.

So they're really proud of themselves, as they should be. And they really felt that they were making a difference. I have nothing but great things to say about the attitudes of the crew. But that question just reminded me that I think it's worth me noting that Denver has done two of these now in the last two months. Q Wow.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Okay. And we'll go back around the horn in a second.

I have a question from Galrahn, sir: 7th Fleet generates a lot of regional publicity surrounding their humanitarian assistance programs, like Pacific Partnership, but also their disaster response and recovery operations -- the 2004 tsunami being one of the most visible, but also in several cyclone and mudslide responses in southeast Asia. As we are at the two-year anniversary of CS21, I was wondering if you can answer whether HA/DR is strategic or operational for the Navy, and how and why; or even what might be missing.

ADM. LANDOLT: I would say it's both strategic and operational. We're going to continue to do these. The amphibious force is that force that's on call and in high demand to practice these with other countries, as we do during Pacific Partnerships or African Partnership Station, or when they go down to South America. But we also make money when we do this and create those relationships during their execution that stand the test of time.

I have -- as I just said, USS Denver has done this twice now in the last two months. It's a good example of this -- to set for other countries who could be thinking about this, because a lot of countries take heat, their governments take heat when they don't respond well to these type of events. We are more than happy to show them how we train for this and the capability we bring. And that, in turn, might help them to drive some of their programs towards those kind of platforms or assets they may need.

Having been around the world in a number of places, for instance, I see too many countries that -- they want to buy a fast, sexy, pointy-nose aircraft; and what they really need are helicopters that can lift cargo and get into mountainsides and help their own people out during times like these.

So I think it -- the answer is both, strategic and operational. We will continue to do this. Pacific Partnership, by the way, is going to involve Indonesia next year. And in fact, the Indonesians have a hospital ship called the "Doctor Soeharso," S-O-E-H-A-R-S-O. Because there was so much damage to the hospitals in Padang, the Soeharso pulled into port there, and was very useful to them. And that same ship will take those lessons learned -- she learned from this real-world exercise -- real-world event, and use it during the Pacific Partnership next year.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you, sir. And back to Maggie --

Q Hello --

ADM. LANDOLT: In July, I was in an exercise that involved -- I was in Saber with the Australians. And during this exercise, I bumped into an awful

lot of Australians that I had met on the exercise Talisman-Saber, and were working with us in this real world -- real- world events. Over.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you, sir. Sorry about that. Maggie, you can go ahead with your question.

Q No. I'm good, thanks.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Okay.

Taylor, would you like to ask another question?

Q No, I don't have another question.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Actually that's good. We're almost up on our time anyways.

So sir, if you have a closing statement, you can go ahead with that right now.

ADM. LANDOLT: Yeah, I would.

We've received an awful lot of positive feedback and interest by using Twitter and Facebook. So if Taylor or Maggie would like to check out those Facebook pages, they start right back where we started during this event. And we took it all the way to the end with a signout. And I like the signout we used.

One of the NGOs told us, you always want to leave when they're still smiling at you and waving at you with all five fingers.

Q (Laughs.)

Q Say that one more time. I didn't hear that.

ADM. LANDOLT: Want to end a humanitarian assistance operation, at that moment, which is -- which can be hard to discern sometimes. But you want to leave when they're still smiling at you and waving with all five fingers.

Q Got it. (Laughs.)

ADM. LANDOLT: So that was my final Twitter entry. And that's how we ended that account.

Our Facebook page also ties in with the CTF-76 site. So if you need further background on this event, I direct you there.

Q Admiral, are you talking about the actual Seventh Fleet Facebook and Twitter account? Or is there something more specific? ADM. LANDOLT: This was something more specific to this event. And if you Google Amphibious Force Seventh Fleet Facebook, it will take you right to that link.

Q Okay.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: All right. And as we wrap up today's call, I just want to thank Rear Admiral Landolt and the bloggers on the line for your questions and comments. And today's program will be available online at the

bloggers link on dod.mil, where you'll be able to access a story based on today's call, along with the source documents such as audio file and print transcripts.

Again thank you, sir and our blogger participants. This concludes today's event.

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